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Theology And Religious Studies

Saint Mary's College of California

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THEOLOGY & RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Religion is a fundamental dimension of human life: vital, pervasive, richly complex and multi-faceted. Its traditions, values, beliefs and practices form the basic categories of meaning for both individuals and cultures. It helps us to ask and answer essential questions about our relationship to God, self, others and the world.

We offer courses that systematically and critically analyze a wide range of theological perspectives and ethical questions that are central in the formation of religious identity. As an integral part of the Catholic mission of Saint Mary's College, we strive to provide students with an opportunity to know and intimately understand the Catholic tradition in all its richness and fullness: biblically, historically, theologically, ethically and aesthetically. We also offer courses in a wide array of world religions since it is crucial that future leaders and responsible citizens have an understanding of the ideologies and faiths of their dialogue partners.

Furthermore, the exploration of these essential questions occupies an important place in a liberal arts education which seeks to expand the mind and guide students to a deeper level of understanding. Our offerings continually charge students to think for themselves, to challenge preconceived notions and to remain open to learning from the perspectives of others. As part of our Lasallian heritage and our understanding of what it means to be a person in light of God's love and grace, revealed especially in Jesus Christ, we join with the Christian Brothers in being concerned for the whole person and in fostering a genuine concern for justice in the world while integrating faith and service.

FACULTY

Michael Barram, Ph.D., *Associate Professor, Chair*

Brother Michael Avila, FSC, Ph.D., *Lecturer*

John Dwyer, Ph.D., *Professor Emeritus*

D. Zach Flanagan, Ph.D., *Associate Professor*

David Gentry-Akin, Ph.D., *Professor*

Paul Giurlanda, Ph.D., *Professor*

Brother Mark McVann, FSC, Ph.D., *Professor*

Brother Michael F. Meister, FSC, Ph.D.,

Assistant Professor

Father John Morris, Ph.D., *Lecturer*

Felicidad Oberholzer, Ph.D., *Professor*

Marie Pagliarini, Ph.D., *Assistant Professor*

Norris W. Palmer, Ph.D., *Professor*

Thomas Poundstone, Ph.D., *Associate Professor*

Brother S. Dominic Ruegg, FSC, Ph.D.,

Professor Emeritus

LEARNING OUTCOMES

When they have completed the two-course requirement in theology & religious studies,

• STUDENTS WILL KNOW:

- the basic biblical story, from Adam to Revelation, as understood in the Christian tradition, including major names, places, events and themes
- the basic historical-cultural background to the biblical texts
- the steps in the formation of the Bible
- some of the diverse ways in which the Bible has been read throughout history

• STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

- employ historical-critical method on biblical, religious and theological texts
- make connections between the biblical story and the topics studied in their second course
- use the tools of scholarship commonly accepted in the academy to study religion
- converse respectfully and critically about religion, especially with those of differing views
- write an essay (of at least several pages and conforming to standard norms for good writing) that demonstrates an ability to analyze religious texts (understood broadly), and to recognize and struggle with their contexts, contradictions and implications

• STUDENTS WILL:

- take growing pleasure in the reading and study of religion
- critically appreciate the Christian tradition
- develop a growing awareness both of the mystery of life and of themselves as called by that mystery
- develop an increasing sensitivity to the dignity of persons, as taught in the Catholic tradition
- gain greater clarity about their beliefs and values, leading to the development of a mature and responsible personal philosophy

GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Students entering Saint Mary's College with fewer than 16.0 units are required to complete two theology & religious studies courses. Students who transfer in with 16.0 or more units must complete only one theology & religious studies course. Please note that **TRS 97** or its equivalent is a prerequisite to all upper-division classes in theology & religious studies. Students may apply theology & religious studies courses beyond those required to their Area A (Humanities) requirement.

Theology & religious studies classes, like Collegiate Seminar courses, are integral to the Saint Mary's experience and are expected to be completed in residence. As such, transfer courses are not routinely accepted in fulfillment of this requirement after establishing residence at Saint Mary's College. For courses taken as part of study abroad to count towards the core requirement in theology & religious studies, they should be shown in advance as not only academically rigorous but also as enhancing the study abroad experience in that particular country.

MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

LOWER DIVISION

TRS 97 The Bible and Its Interpretation

UPPER DIVISION

TRS 169 Theory and Method in the Study of Religion

One course, selected with guidance of the chair, from each of the following five areas:

- Christian History
- Scripture
- Contemporary Christian Thought
- Ethics
- World Religions

Three additional elective courses

Majors are also encouraged to take the "intensive inquiry" courses chosen each semester by the department and having special prerequisites.

MINOR REQUIREMENTS

MINOR IN THEOLOGY & RELIGIOUS STUDIES

The minor in theology & religious studies requires five courses: **TRS 97 The Bible and Its Interpretation**, **TRS 169 Theory and Method in the Study of Religion**, and any three upper-division courses selected with the guidance of the chair. The department strongly recommends that at least one of the upper-division courses for the minor should be an intensive inquiry class.

MINOR IN CATHOLIC TRADITION

The Theology & Religious Studies Department also offers a focused minor in the "Catholic tradition." Six courses are required:

- **TRS 97 The Bible and Its Interpretation**;
- two of the following three courses, preferably in sequence: **TRS 101 Origins of Christianity**, **TRS 102 The Middle Ages**, and **TRS 103 The Reformation Era**;
- either **TRS 141 Christian Ethics** or **TRS 143 Catholic Social Teachings**;
- and two electives from a list of classes focusing on the Catholic tradition.

PREREQUISITE GRADE

Theology & Religious Studies 97 is a prerequisite for any upper-division theology & religious studies course; however, only a passing grade in **TRS 97** is required, not a minimum grade of C-.

C O U R S E S

LOWER DIVISION

97 The Bible and Its Interpretation

This course focuses on the Bible, the sacred scriptures of the Jewish and Christian peoples. This diverse collection of writings has served as inspiration and catalyst for a great number of central events in human history—from the movements of liberation led by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., to the great human tragedies of slavery in the Old South and the medieval Crusades. These texts have also had a profound influence on art, literature, philosophy, and politics for over two thousand years of history, particularly in the West. As such, an understanding of the Bible is essential for a well-informed perspective on the world. This course will introduce students to the most important biblical events and themes, raising questions of the influence and relevance of this text for the modern world. This course will also teach students to employ critical, scholarly tools for reading and interpretation, such as historical and literary criticism, as well as various lenses for the modern academic study of religion. Co-curricular lectures are an integral part of this class.

UPPER DIVISION

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

100 Topics in Christian History

An investigation of a topic in Christian history not covered by the regular offerings of the department. Topics are announced prior to registration each semester. May be repeated for credit when content changes.

Prerequisite: **TRS 97**.

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101 Origins of Christianity

The Christian religion begins its story with only a few dozen followers of a crucified man in the first century—backwater, uneducated, and unlikely to survive very long in a Mediterranean world dominated by much more powerful religious systems. Yet, within less than three centuries, Christianity would overwhelm the Roman Empire and beyond, building an elaborate theological and ecclesiastical system that would last until the present day. This course examines the rise of this Christian movement, focusing on such topics as Gnosticism, martyrdom, and the development of Christian ideas about Jesus.

Prerequisite: TRS 97.

102 Medieval Christianity

The European Middle Ages was a world dominated by monks, popes, and mystics. Life was an uninterrupted struggle between heaven and hell, life and death, priests and kings. This course is an introduction to the major figures, events, and movements of this period from the fall of Rome to the dawn of modernity. Students will have the opportunity to explore the great pillars of medieval religion—monasticism, papalism, theology, and mysticism—as well as delve into the darker side of the Crusades and the burning of heretics. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

103 Reformations

Every age of Christian history has been marked by the call for religious reform—renewing both the personal lives of each believer and the institutional structures that endure through the centuries. However, such a universal passion for reform took on special importance in the 15th and 16th centuries, a period that has come to be known as The Reformation. This course explores the variety of reforming voices, Protestant and Catholic, that shaped the future of Christianity, giving special attention to the major theological and political issues that dominated the time. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

104 Challenge of Modernity

The challenge of modern times for Christian faith means both Christianity's challenge from modernity and her challenge to it. How has an old faith with the wrinkles of millennia coexisted, commingled, contended with the new and even shrill cry that we dare to know, that we find truth for ourselves, that we revolt and be free, and that no church or creed or state stand in the way of such freedom, truth, and knowledge? The various critiques of religion which have emerged since the Enlightenment have raised issues which call into question the possibility of Christian faith. This course will explore several of those issues (especially regarding the doctrines of God, creation, incarnation, and grace) in order to appreciate the truth and relevance of the critiques. It will then consider how responsible persons today can express the Christian faith in such a way as to take account of the critiques. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

SCRIPTURE

110 Topics in the Study of Scripture

An investigation of a topic in scripture not covered by the regular offerings of the department. Topics are announced prior to registration each semester. May be repeated for credit when content changes. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

111 The Pentateuch

A study of the first five books of the Bible, the history of their composition, and their theological contributions to Judaism and Christianity. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

114 The Gospel of Mark

A close study of the Gospel of Mark with an emphasis on its literary, historical, social, and political background. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

115 Jesus and His Teaching

An exploration of teachings attributed to Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount, parables, and other memorable statements), emphasizing the ways in which Jesus' statements have been interpreted and appropriated. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

116 Paul's Letters and Legacy

An in-depth examination of the letters of Paul, focusing on the mission and message of the apostle in his Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts. Students develop a broad understanding of the apostle's work and thought, as well as an appreciation for the historic and continuing impact of these documents. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

117 Wealth and Poverty in the Bible

This course explores biblical and theological perspectives and values on wealth, poverty, and economic justice, paying particular attention to potential implications those issues may have for the contemporary Christian community and wider society. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

119 Apocalypse and Eschatology

Earthquakes, war, and famine...the lamb, the dragon, and the beast...persecution, judgment, and re-creation...For nearly 2000 years, the Book of Revelation has fascinated, frightened, and perplexed its Christian readers. Is it a literal prediction of the coming end of the world? Is it an elaborate, symbolic allegory about the battle between good and evil? Is it a coded message between the persecuted Christians of the first century? This course will explore the life and afterlife of the Book of Revelation: its origins in contemporary Jewish and Christian literature and world-views, its meaning for a first-century Christian readership, and the long and fascinating history of its interpretation, from the early church to modern fascination with the Antichrist, the Millennium, and the Rapture. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

120 Topics in Contemporary Christian Thought

An investigation of an area of Christian thought not covered by the regular offerings of the department. May be repeated for credit when content changes. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

121 **Belief and Unbelief**

An investigation, theoretical and existential, of the challenge of faith today. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

122 **Jesus: The Person and the Myth**

This course examines the traditional sources of the Christian community's understanding of Jesus of Nazareth in the light of contemporary concerns and critiques. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

123 **Sex and the Spirit**

An exploration of a contested area in Christian thought today, setting traditional understandings in dialogue with contemporary concerns and critiques. How does our experience of ourselves as sexual beings open us to the experience of the holy, and conversely, how might our desire for God be intimately related to our sexual desire and longings? These are the questions that will be the focus of our work. Not a course on sexual ethics, this course is an exploration of the complex interrelationship of sexual and spiritual desire as both are reflected upon in the Christian spiritual tradition and others. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

124 **War and Violence**

This course provides a brief overview of Christian attitudes toward war, and then explores current authors, with the aim of stimulating students to arrive at a considered and responsible position. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

125 **Women in the Christian Tradition**

An introduction to the major themes and tensions that shape the study of women in the Christian tradition. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

SACRAMENTS AND SPIRITUALITY

130 **Topics in Spirituality**

An investigation of a topic in spirituality not covered by the regular offerings of the department. Topics are announced prior to registration each semester. May be repeated for credit when content changes. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

131 **Christian Spirituality**

This course explores the experience, understanding, and living out of the Christian faith. It studies classical and contemporary texts of some of its most important figures of Christian spirituality. It examines various expressions of spirituality in architecture, poetry, painting, and music. It considers the question of religion versus spirituality as well as the question of relating to God within a universe of galaxies that seems to dwarf all human experience. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

132 **Sexuality, Marriage and Family: A Catholic Perspective**

A presentation of the teaching of the Church on all aspects of sexuality, marriage and family. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

133 **Life Stories and Theology**

Uses narratives of exemplary lives, ancient and modern, Christian and non-Christian, as a tool to investigate the task of authentic existence today in the light of the gospel. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

134 **The Catholic Imagination**

The thesis of this course is that there is a unique way of looking at the world: "the Catholic Imagination." This imagination can be discerned, not only in church teaching, but also in art and architecture, music—both "sacred" and "secular," painting, fiction, poetry, and film, in the church's concern for social justice, and in the stories of individual women and men of faith, many of whom have shown incredible vision and heroism. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

ETHICS

140 **Topics in Christian Ethics**

An investigation of a topic in ethics not covered by the regular offerings of the department. Topics are announced prior to registration each semester. May be repeated for credit when content changes. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

141 **Christian Ethics**

This course introduces students to the disciplined study of ethics in the Roman Catholic tradition and the reformulation of Catholic ethics which has taken place in the spirit of Vatican II. The primary focus is on the fundamental topics of moral theology: what difference Jesus makes to moral theology, the role of scripture, virtue, the conscience, sin and conversion, the fundamental option, proportionalism, the teaching authority of the church on moral matters, and the relation of morality to civil law. Concrete issues such as contraception and homosexuality will be considered as test cases for Roman Catholic moral theology and as illustrations of the debates and tensions present in Catholic ethics since Vatican II. This course also integrates the insights of Christian ethics through a discussion of film and drama. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

142 **Medical Ethics**

Ethics—how we should live—is at the core of medical practice. With the dramatic changes in medical practice in recent decades, from new technologies, to changes in financing, to a changed conception of patient rights, medical ethics has rapidly moved from obscurity to become one of the most important areas of applied ethics. This course explores the relation between religious and moral values and the choices we as individuals and as a society make about health care. Basic principles and methods of contemporary medical ethics will be introduced along with a focus on virtue ethics and competing models of the patient-physician relationship. A wide range of issues will be analyzed: informed consent, confidentiality, research on human subjects, reproductive technology, appropriate care for seriously ill newborns, abortion, gene therapy, quality-of-life assessments, terminal sedation, withdrawal of nutrition and hydration, physician-assisted suicide, and proposals for health-care reform. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

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143 Catholic Social Teachings

Explores the Catholic approach to questions of social justice (e.g., the problems of poverty, exploitation, and racism). *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

WORLD RELIGIONS

150 Topics in World Religions

An investigation of a topic in world religions not covered by the regular offerings of the department. Topics are announced prior to registration each semester. May be repeated for credit when content changes. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

151 Judaism

Modern Jewish life is the product of more than 3000 years of evolving thought, worship, traditions, theology, history, and civilization. This course examines these interweaving strands of Jewish civilization as it investigates the dynamic role Judaism plays for its adherents then and now. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

152 Islam: Beliefs and Practices

The course introduces the students to the ideas that shaped Islamic history, from the early pre-Islamic period and the conditions prevalent at Islam's inception all the way to the present. The basic belief system, rituals, mystical traditions and Islamic societal interaction will be studied with ample references from the Qur'an and prophetic statements. The Prophet Muhammad will be explored in depth and various sources of historical record will be examined. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

153 Eastern Religions

This course is an introduction to the study of religion by way of four of the world's major traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Chinese religious field (Confucianism and Taoism). The emphasis will be on each tradition's views of the nature of ultimate reality, human nature, the highest good that life can attain, and the conduct that leads to that attainment. Attention will also be given to the difficulties of trying to cross conceptual boundaries. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

154 Hinduism

This course examines the cultural/religious phenomenon of "Hinduism" in a number of its ancient and modern forms by examining how it has developed in the context of historical forces and responded to the modern world as it adapts to a global setting. It examines dimensions of Hindu theology and philosophy; the role of deities, temples, and cultural practices; investigates central myths, much-loved stories, global gurus, and Bollywood films. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

155 Buddhism

This course examines the history, thought, and practice of Buddhism by studying the enduring themes and cultural adaptations of its main schools through primary and secondary texts, art, video/audio, and field trips. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

156 Religions of India

The course focuses on the religious traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and Sikhism and examines their interaction in historical context and contemporary India. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

157 Pluralism and Interreligious Dialogue

This course proceeds under the assumption that various of the world's religions are similar in enough ways to make some comparison possible and different enough to make it interesting. The history, prospects, and limitations of interreligious dialogue are considered within the context of an increasingly pluralistic world. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

RELIGION AND CULTURE

160 Topics in Religion and Culture

An investigation of a topic of religion and culture not covered by the regular offerings of the department. Topics are announced prior to each semester. May be repeated for credit when content changes. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

161 Religion and Literature

An exploration of the rich relationship between literary productions and religious commitment. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

162 Biblical Themes in Literature

Religious and biblical themes are woven into important works of modern American fiction. This course usually features a critical reading of biblical texts like *Genesis*, *Exodus*, and *Maccabees* followed by a reading of plays and novels like *Inherit the Wind*, *A Different Drummer*, and *The Chosen*. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

164 Dante and The Divine Comedy

This course offers an in-depth spiritual and literary exploration of one of the greatest works of world literature: Dante's *Divine Comedy*. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

165 Spiritual, Not Religious: Emerson to the New Age

The American tradition of individual seeking in religion is as old as the Republic, but may be said to have its serious origin in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. This course seeks to situate the contemporary phrase "spiritual, not religious," in a larger historical context and to compare contemporary American understandings of spirituality without institutional borders to more traditional understandings of spirituality. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

167 Seeing Salvation: Christian Art and Architecture

This course examines the buildings, paintings, and sculptures that Christian artists over the centuries have created in their attempts to give visible embodiment to their religious experiences. The course will focus on what their creations reveal of how they understood the gospel, how well they gave expression to the deepest longings of the human heart, and the influence of their creations on our understanding of the Christian faith. *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

169 Theory and Method in the Study of Religion

This course is designed to give students a foundation in the theories and methods used to study religion.

The course will examine classical and contemporary approaches to the study of religion and the development of religious studies as an academic discipline. The focus will be on seminal theories and methods, such as those formulated by Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, and Clifford Geertz. A key component of the course will be an exploration of the differences between theological and religious studies approaches to religion and the way these approaches have influenced each other. Students will also have the opportunity to become familiar with critical issues and debates within the contemporary field of religious studies, such as the relationship between religion and power, the role of the body in religion, and the place of theological perspectives in the academic study of religion. (For majors and minors only.) *Prerequisite:* TRS 97.

197 Special Study

An independent study or research course for students whose needs are not met by the regular course offerings of the department. Permission of the department chair and instructor required.

198 Special Study — Honors

An independent study or research course for upper-division majors with at least a B average in theology & religious studies. Permission of the department chair and instructor required.